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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 LA PAZ 001289

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/06/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [BO](#)
SUBJECT: MIXED SIGNALS FOR JUNE 9 EMBASSY PROTEST

REF: A. LA PAZ 1284
[1](#)B. LA PAZ 1189

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Embassy contacts are providing widely divergent estimates (from 150 to several thousand) regarding participation estimates for a June 9 march which will culminate at the Embassy. Contacts tell PolOff radical Altono leaders are trying to artificially graft an anti-U.S. theme onto an event organized to protest racism. They suspect this lobbying to continue until the last minute, when Altono leaders plan to address crowds at Plaza San Francisco, the end point of the originally scheduled march against racism. EcoPol contacts generally minimize the ability of radicals to move large crowds on a subsequent additional leg of the march to the Embassy, but RSO police contacts, PAS media contacts, and other sources anticipate a large and violent crowd, fueled by outrage following news coverage June 5 that ex-Defense Minister Carlos Sanchez Berzain was granted asylum in the U.S. The Embassy is reduced to essential staff June 9 and has set up an alternate command post at the USAID building, which is in another part of La Paz. End Summary.

Worst Case Scenario: Multitudes Descend from El Alto

[1](#)2. (C) Police contacts tell RSO that they are expecting up to 10,000 protesters to march on the Embassy June 9. The police advised the Embassy to close operations and added the protest could get violent and involve use of dynamite. La Paz and El Alto newspaper editors told our PAS office they predicted large crowds outside the Embassy due to public outrage following news coverage that ex-Defense Minister Carlos Sanchez Berzain was granted asylum in the U.S. (reftel a). (Note: Many blame Berzain for a bloody standoff between the military and anti-government forces in El Alto in October, [1](#)2003. End Note.) Other sections report similar predictions from their contacts for a large and violent demonstration.

[1](#)3. (C) There will also be a general strike in El Alto June 9. We are preparing for the worst and hoping for the best. The Embassy will be on minimal staffing and closed to the public June 9. We have set up an alternate command center at the USAID building in another part of La Paz and will be sending in sitreps as appropriate.

14. (C) FEJUVE Executive Board Member Juan Escalier told PolOff June 6 that "this is not a done deal yet; things are very much in flux." He said FEJUVE (a powerful El Alto neighborhood organization) would meet at 1700 June 6 to discuss the issue of FEJUVE participation, where he will argue against including the Embassy in the march because "we need to export to the United States and these people are jeopardizing that." FEJUVE Vice President Luis Huanca told us he is "at war" with FEJUVE President Ismael Herrera over the issue and plans to challenge him at the meeting to make the case that "this is not a good idea for El Alto." Escalier estimated no more than 10 percent of the marchers would continue from the marches original end-point of Plaza San Francisco, or about 500 to 1,000 protesters. He said the crowd would have been just a few hundred, but the Berzain story "has changed the calculus."

15. (C) Central Workers Union (COR) Secretary General Remigio Condori told Embassy Indigenous Advisor he was trying to fight Rocha (whose union group is also a constituent part of the COR) and keep the march with its original anti-racism and anti-opposition themes. Condori said the COR is "too divided to take detailed positions," and that engaging in such issues as blaming the Embassy for Berzain's asylum or trying to link the Embassy to racism would further fracture the organization. He and other contacts said COR President Edgar

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Patana is only lukewarm in his endorsement of including the Embassy, as it runs counter to his efforts to reunite a fractured COR leadership. Condori, a march organizer, said de la Cruz is the principal architect of the strategy to add the U.S. Embassy to the march route. Condori said he remained a friend of the United States, but that "for the time being" it was too risky for him to meet with us.

16. (C) MAS City Councilman Gustavo Morales said the government isn't involved or paying for march participation (Note: Other contacts assert some combination of El Alto Mayor Fanar Nava and the national government, using Venezuelan funds, are paying for participation, although we have not been able to confirm this. Rocha is allegedly close with avidly anti-U.S. Minister of Presidency Juan Ramon Quintana and Minister of Interior Alfredo Rada. End Note.) and is not involved in trying to steer the march to the Embassy. He said only a small group, which he defined as less than 1,000 would march on the Embassy. He did not think the Berzain asylum news would change participation significantly.

17. (C) FEJUVE Director of International Relations Arturo Baltazar likewise told PolOff it was likely to be a small percentage of anti-racism group that would march on the Embassy, although he was not even sure if the march would happen. "This was originally a strike, that's what everyone signed on for. Now they keep expanding it. People are getting annoyed with this and may just say enough." He said FEJUVE chapters in five of El Alto's districts said they will not participate.

18. (C) National Deputy Franklin Lavayen Luna (opposition PODEMOS) told PolOff June 4 that the march would consist of a small group (100-200) of the usual suspects: the La Paz Civic Committee (a cloned MAS organization) and the "El Alto Taliban" (the informal name for City Councilman Roberto de la Cruz's supporters). Lavayen said even mobilization for the main march to San Francisco would be difficult for Altono leaders as people are more angry about inflation than they are about racism. He said El Alto only shows up in large numbers when the subject has a tangible impact on their daily lives, such as in 2003 when the subject was distribution of natural resource wealth, or when they are being paid.

Lavayen said march organizer Rocha told him there are limited funds for this march, enough to mobilize Rocha and some leaders but not enough to trickle down to membership. He added that although leadership can cajole participation through fines and intimidation, this hasn't been working very well for El Alto lately with disgruntled "hungry" members. "Many people are just saying I've got better things to do, like feed my family, and the leadership is too divided and weak to enforce anything."

Last-Minute Lobbying to Continue

¶9. (C) All contacts agree key organizations remain divided, both generally and with regard to including the U.S. as a target of the June 9 march. They contended that lobbying for and against participating in the additional leg of the march to the Embassy would continue until the end of the original leg in Plaza San Francisco, where they expected radicals to rail against the U.S. "empire" in a last minute plea to compel people to continue

March Madness Origins

¶10. (C) FEJUVE's Escalier said that radicals like City Councilman Robert de la Cruz (Movemnt 17), Federation of Unions Executive Secretary Brualio Rocha, and Federation of Urban Agrarian Communities (FSCARUSU) Executive Director Zacarias Maquera, are trying to artificially graft an anti-U.S. message and march to the Embassy on an existing resolution and march centered "on an issue we all agree on,

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racism." He said "most" El Alto leaders, including COR and FEJUVE senior leaders, understand that marching to the Embassy is "a bad idea," but that they are under political pressure and to make a least a token gesture toward any "anti-imperialist initiative." Although FEJUVE's president said June 4 the organization would support the march, Escalier contends this was an unofficial endorsement and a statement he was "pressured into making." Despite his rhetorical support for the march, Escalier said even Rocha's group is divided on marching on the Embassy.

¶11. (C) FEJUVE's Baltazar said that radical leaders have been talking out of turn on behalf of El Alto since the original strike/march resolution was drafted May 29 in an attempt to "make Evo happy" and "alter reality." He contends El Alto groups agreed strictly to the points in the El Alto Inter-Institutional Committee (IIC) resolution, which do not include any reference to the U.S. The resolution focuses on racism and demands perpetrators and "intellectual authors" of racist offenses be prosecuted, particularly those involved in forcing indigenous supporters of Evo to march shirtless and kneel in Sucre May 24 (reftel b). It also mentions support of President Evo Morales and against department (state) opposition leaders for the upcoming August 10 recall referendum, and rejects any claim from "racist" Sucre as the capital. A new El Alto IIC resolution released June 6, however, includes the United States as a cause for convoking the June 9 general strike: "against the North American Embassy, against racism, the oligarchy, and in support of the process of change."

¶12. (C) El Alto City Councilman Morales said even at the leadership level, many, such as FEJUVE's new president, are making public statements out of an obligation to maintain their anti-imperialist credentials and remain in favor of the government. Councilman Morales blamed fellow Councilman de la Cruz for making the United States a target in an initiative intended to target racism. He stressed the original resolution made no mention of the U.S. and said he are not being cryptically referred to "intellectual authors" of events in Sucre May 24. Only during a follow-up meeting orchestrated for the media on May 30 did the U.S. come up at

the behest of de la Cruz, Rocha, and Maquera. Although the El Alto Mayor and two other council members attended, they didn't speak and presence was not an endorsement of the U.S. bashing. Councilman Morales contends that the three just got carried away showboating in front of the cameras. He suspects the U.S. would have never come up if the media had not showed up.

¶13. (C) Lavayen said he talked to key organizer Rocha, a supposed close friend, on June 2 to talk him out of the additional march to the Embassy. Rocha didn't disagree with Lavayen's arguments, but told him he there was too much money involved for him personally to turn down. According to Lavayen, Rocha is also taking advantage of the cooling of support for the government from other Altono leaders to step into the breach and improve his standing. Other contacts contend Rocha's is trying to gain momentum for a run at the COR presidency, as the current COR president may be positioning himself for a run at department prefect (state governor). He said whether "the government" can mobilize significant numbers for "their march" would be a far more accurate indicator of President Morales' ultimate strength in El Alto than polls, which he said vastly overestimate Morales' popularity.

Comment

¶14. (C) The timing of the Berzain stories was unfortunate and will boost numbers in any Embassy protest June 9. Linking us to the deplorable acts in Sucre May 24, however clumsily, is beyond the pale (and not much of a mobilizing factor). How many will come, if they will be paid, and by whom are matters of conjecture at this point. In Altono fashion, critical

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decisions may wait until Saturday's march organizing meeting or may even be made during the march itself.

¶15. (C) June 9 plans to march to Embassy, regardless of their success, constitute an unfortunate and short sighted strategy on the part of its organizers. We have a long history as a trusted partner to El Alto, which has not been lost on some Altono leaders. USAID provided \$6 million in development assistance to El Alto in 2007. Our trade preference supports roughly half of El Alto's burgeoning textile industry, importing \$19 million in exports to the United States.
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